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SUBJECT: FRENCH ENVIRONMENT OFFICIALS SEEK EARLY MEETING WITH OBAMA
ADMINISTRATION

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Several French environment officials have underscored France's desire be a trailblazer on global environment and expressed the GOF's wish to meet the Obama Administration climate officials as soon as possible to discuss climate negotiations in preparation for the December 2009 Copenhagen Conference. Although the French EU Presidency ended on December 31, 2008, the French still see themselves as driving European climate change negotiating tactics. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Senior French environmental officials at the Ministry of Ecology, Environment, Sustainable Development and Regional Planning (MEEDDAT) including Secretary of State for Ecology Natalie Kosciusko-Morizet, Ambassador on Climate Negotiations Brice Lalonde, and Special Advisor to Environment Ministry Borloo Peter Carl have emphasized to us the GOF's desire to push the global environmental envelope (See Paris Points). MEEDDAT International Climate Negotiations Team Leader Paul Watkinson reiterated to ESTH Counselor the French desire for an early meeting with Obama Administration environment officials looking toward the December 2009 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations in Copenhagen and to discuss the goals. He hopes that Copenhagen will result in a ten-page statement of agreed principles sufficient to claim political success, with the more difficult question of implementing details to be worked out later.

¶3. (SBU) Watkinson sees the climate negotiations as increasingly complex and operating on several levels simultaneously. Parallel activities outside the UNFCCC negotiating process, such as the G-8, G-20 and Major Economies Meeting (MEM), will facilitate talks and may produce side agreements. In particular, the MEM could facilitate consensus, particularly if the Obama Administration encourages a sense of process ownership. Controversial issues should be discussed quietly outside the highly politicized UNFCCC forum in Copenhagen.

¶4. (SBU) Watkinson welcomed the prospect that the US Congress might pass legislation setting the goal of reducing US GHG emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. This would set the US on a downward trajectory. Given the European goal of reducing GHG by 20 percent below 1990, the European Greens, however, might reject this US effort as insufficient and seek to disrupt the Copenhagen negotiations. He believes ways can be found to get around this potential obstruction.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Watkinson approach adds to our impression that the French continue to perceive themselves as driving European tactics in the run up to the December 2009 Copenhagen negotiations. Hence their great desire to be first in line for environment talks with the incoming Administration.

Stapleton